

Achieving Impact with Community Benefit

A Seminar to share learning- Dumfries, 27th August 2013

Seminar Report- Part 1

Executive Summary

Foundation Scotland is at the forefront of developing and implementing community benefit funds, in partnership with communities and developers. We currently work with around sixty Community Councils and fifteen developers, to distribute more than £1million to local communities across Scotland annually.

Foundation Scotland's strategic role gives us a unique overview and opportunity to influence good practice in community benefit. This seminar is part of a series of events the foundation is running, bringing together all the stakeholders involved in community benefit funds, with the aim of sharing experience and learning.

Who was there?

The event brought together over ninety delegates and speakers from:

- Community Councils, Development Trusts and other community organisations
- Commercial developers and associated industry support agencies
- Intermediary organisations and community/ third sector support agencies
- Local and national government

The event was open to all but, given the location, the majority of delegates attending were from the Dumfries and Galloway local authority area. However, there were also significant numbers of delegates from Highland region, the Scottish Borders, South Lanarkshire, South and East Ayrshire, the central belt and northern England.

Structure and themes

The day was facilitated by James Hilder, from An Roth Associates. James introduced the speakers, kept the discussion moving and facilitated questions and feedback from the floor.

Foundation Scotland recognised that there would be a great deal of expertise and knowledge gathered in the room and aimed to provide opportunities for discussion between delegates as far as possible. To this end, delegates were seated at round tables, each with a table host to facilitate dialogue and a note-taker to capture key points from the discussion. Table plans were produced in advance to help ensure a mix of voices from different sectors and geographic areas.

The seminar focussed on three key themes or aspects of community benefit over the day:

- The local and national policy context
- The impact of funds and how communities can maximise the benefits
- The governance of funds and how they are managed and supported

Each theme was approached as follows:

- Speakers provided an introduction to the topic and ideas to spark discussion
- A facilitated discussion amongst delegates at each table followed
- Feedback to the whole room on key points rounded off the session

Local context

This event was Foundation Scotland's first in south Scotland, where there is significant expansion in onshore wind development. Although neither Foundation Scotland's work, nor the seminar, intended to address planning issues, these emerged from questions and discussions as a major area of concern for community representatives.

Additionally, as outlined above, the location meant that the majority of delegates were drawn from the Dumfries and Galloway local authority area. The D&G Council is in the process of developing and implementing a policy on community benefit. This also emerged from discussions as controversial locally.

Key messages & learning

- There is a dearth of objective, independent information about all aspects of community benefit that is readily available or accessible to communities.
- There is a mixed picture in terms of the rates of community benefit being paid to communities and no compulsion can be applied to Developers. A strong consensus emerged that the minimum rate should be £5,000 per MW of installed capacity per year.
- Community councils struggle to balance their, sometimes conflicted, roles around wind energy development and community benefit- i.e. commenting on planning issues whilst negotiating for a strong community benefit package.
- There are multiple approaches to establishing and administering a community benefit fund and multiple models. Some communities wish to administer funds themselves; others appreciate independent third party support.
- No single approach is 'right', what is most important is that the community have involvement in and ownership of the fund direction.
- Developing a community action plan at the outset is an excellent way to identify local needs and make effective, strategic decisions about use of the fund.
- Community benefit funds are being used for a very wide range of purposes and offer more flexibility and long-term investment opportunities than conventional grant funding streams. They can also help unlock significant funding from other sources. The flip-side is that they can also inadvertently create dependency on a fund.
- There were very mixed views about local authority involvement in fund administration and region-wide uses of funds. In general, voluntary community representatives were more opposed, while professionals with a regional remit were more in favour.
- Involvement in community benefit funds takes up a great deal of volunteer time, irrespective of how the fund is managed. Many communities struggle to recruit and retain volunteers.

Further details of the presentations and discussions are provided in the second part of this report, available as a separate document on our website.